

NRCS Alabama

Current Developments



October 2004

From The State Conservationist - *Robert N. Jones*

Recent weather crises have overshadowed routine activities in Alabama in the past few weeks. I participated in a fly-over with state officials on Monday, September 20th. From the air, one could very easily see the path that the hurricane took. Areas west of the path received little damage while areas east of the storm sustained substantial damage. I am glad to report that, to my knowledge, all NRCS employees and their families came through the storm without injury. Our hearts go out to those who suffered property loss.

As we close another fiscal year, a review of a few statistics indicates how busy field personnel have been. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is our most far-reaching program. Statewide we received 4,062 applications for EQIP contracts; 1,258 contracts were developed obligating \$11,665,995. That is about half of the amount needed to fund all contracts in the state.

The activity associated with developing those contracts represents a tremendous workload. I want to express my appreciation to each of you for what you have accomplished in a relatively short period of time.

As we reflect on the recent hurricane, we are reminded of the really important issues in life. With all the changes in NRCS programs and the learning curve that often accompanies those changes, it's easy to become frustrated. Let's never forget what's really important and set our personal and work-related priorities accordingly.

I want to say a special "Welcome Home" to Ronnie Davis in the Geneva Field Office. Ronnie has been on an extended tour of duty in Kosovo. We're glad he is back home.

Bob

Cogongrass Field Day

Farmers and other property owners are invited to attend the "Stop Cogongrass Field Day" October 21, organized by the Alabama Invasive Plant Council. NRCS is one of the sponsors for the event. The meeting will be held at the farm of Riley Boykin Smith, Palamar Land Company, north of McIntosh in Washington County.

The program will include instructions on how to identify the invasive grass, the economical and ecological costs of the invasion, and how effective treatments are applied. Available and projected cost-share programs for landowners also will be discussed.

For directions or registration information contact Keith Tassin, at 205-251-1155, ext. 104, email: ktassin@tnc.org, or Ben Moore at 334-335-3613, email: bennie.moore@al.usda.gov.



Grassland Reserve Program 2004

by Eddie Jolley, Conservation Agronomist, Auburn, AL

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) received funding for the second consecutive year. Alabama was allocated \$645,000. This year \$50,000 was set aside for cost-share assistance in planting native grasses. About 60 percent (\$357,000) of the remaining funds was to be used for easements, and 30-year contracts. The remaining 40 percent (\$238,000) was to be used for 10-, 15-, and 20-year contracts.

Preservation of native and natural grasslands and shrublands was deemed high priority in Alabama. The threat of conversion concern continued to be significant in ranking. For the first time, Alabama offered cost-share assistance to those approved and willing to restore native grasses.

Participation in the GRP varied across the state. Some offices did not have any applications while others had many. For FY 2004, there were 181 applications submitted for GRP in Alabama.

Thus far, \$251,080 has been obligated on eight contracts. The GRP easement is still pending appraisal and applicant enrollment. Additional funds have been requested to fund additional acres from the GRP offer.

New this year for GRP was the web based tool for entering and ranking applications. To date comments on the tool have been very favorable. It has been invaluable in managing GRP for FY 2004.

A GRP manual should be available in FY 2005. The program is still evolving and changes are expected as public comments are considered.

Other cost-share program activities for 2004

EQIP

- Number of applicants - 4,062
- Funds requested - \$28,000,000+
- Contracts developed - 1,258
- Funds obligated - \$11,665,995

WHIP

- Contracts developed - 80
- Funds obligated - \$419,500

WRP

- Number of applications - 7
- Funds requested - \$1,118,200
- Easements obligated - 1 full and 1 partial
- Funds obligated - \$400,000; requested additional funds for second easement

FRPP

- Number of proposals - 7
- Value of easements - \$7,359,200
- Number proposals approved - 2 full, 1 partial
- Funds obligated - \$935,500



Preservation of native and natural grasslands and shrublands was deemed high priority in Alabama.

Alabama's First Annual GrazeFest Conference

Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture Ron Sparks teamed up with country music star Teddy Gentry to host the first GrazeFest Conference at the Garrett Coliseum in Montgomery, Alabama, September 11-12, 2004. Gentry and Sparks attended high school together in Fort Payne and have been lifelong friends. When the Alabama singer asked the commissioner if he would help with GrazeFest, he got a quick endorsement. The event was co-sponsored by the U.S. Grass Fed Society.

Cattlemen and farmers from across the country spent time talking about an issue of growing importance to agriculture—grass vs feed. The premise of the grass-fed theory is that corn-fed animals consume starch, and the meat they provide is not as wholesome or as healthy as that which comes from grass-fed animals. Conference organizers had hoped for 300 attendees; they were delighted that approximately 600 folks came to the event. The conference included numerous exhibits as well as well-known agriculture speakers. NRCS staffed an exhibit as well as the Alabama Grazing Lands

Coalition. GrazeFest will be held next year in Jackson, Mississippi.



Alabama band member Steve Boland, gets a grazing stick from Eddie Jolley, NRCS Agronomist, and Charles Holmes, chair of the Alabama Grazing Lands Coalition. NRCS and the Alabama Grazing Lands Coalition staffed exhibits at the GrazeFest Conference.

Alabama Receives Conservation Innovation Grants

Agriculture Secretary Anne M. Veneman announced the selection of two projects in Alabama that will receive funds for innovation technologies and approaches to improve air, water, and soil quality. The grants are part of nearly \$14,250,000 in grants that will fund the development and adoption of innovation technologies and approaches through pilot projects and conservation field trials nationwide. Thanks to the efforts of Mike Roden, Coordinator of the Tennessee Valley RC&D Council and Andrew Williams, Outreach Liaison, Alabama received grants to fund the following innovative projects:

Tennessee Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council in Decatur, Alabama, will receive \$462,220 to introduce and demonstrate the feasibility of using low-cost, temporary storage techniques or structures for poultry house litter.

The United Christian Community Association, Stafford, Alabama, will receive \$37,500 to create local demonstration farms that will provide limited resource farmers with training and technical assistance in management of intensive grazing systems.

Erosion and Sediment Control Field Days

by Earl Norton, Retired State Resource Conservationist, Auburn, Alabama

"Red Water Blues" is the theme for "show and tell" demonstrations about best management practices. The activity is part of the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee and partners' effort to improve environmental protection at non-agricultural construction sites. Because of Hurricane Ivan, field days were rescheduled at Prattville (October 14) and Fairhope (November 3).



About 150 persons attended the event at Liberty Park, near Birmingham, on September 9. Skip Ragsdale of Sunshine Supplies discussed polyacrylamide (PAM) applications, storm drain inlet protection devices, and the purpose of a temporary slope drain.



About 70 persons attended the event at Enterprise on September 23. NRCS State Conservation Engineer Perry Oakes and American Excelsior Regional Engineer Pete Romocki discussed watershed treatment and the proper installation of turf reinforcement blanket (TRM) and rip-rap lined swale at this channel site.



Approximately 75 persons were in attendance at The Village of Providence. The channel pictured has been stabilized by the developer with a permanent erosion control blanket referred to as Turf reinforcement mat (TRM), a planting of bermudagrass, and rock rip-rap.

Retiree News From Jesse Bush

In 1986, a large group of SCS retirees met in Guntersville for the first retiree meeting in Alabama. Since that time, SCS/NRCS retirees have gotten together every six months for good food and fellowship, interesting programs, tours, and to reminisce about old times. For most of those 18 years attendance at the meetings was quite good, ranging from 12 to 20 or more retirees at each meeting. In recent years, however, attendance has dropped

considerably. Over the past two years we had six to meet in Auburn, eight in Prattville, and only four in Oxford two weeks ago. Potentially there were 35 to 40 retirees within 75 miles of these locations.

Regretfully, I'm not scheduling any further SCS/NRCS meetings at this time. If sufficient interest develops in the future among recent retirees, then the situation may change. In the meantime, please continue to let me or the State Office know of any significant events in your life that you would like to share with the SCS/NRCS family.

RC&D News

Alabama RC&D Councils Win Awards at Annual Meeting

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council members from nine southeastern states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands held their annual Southeastern Association of RC&D Councils Meeting September 23-25 in Savannah, Georgia. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange successful project ideas, network, receive training, and to recognize outstanding achievement.

The Tennessee Valley, ALA-TOM, and Tombigbee RC&D Councils were recognized for Outstanding Contribution to the Partnership Alliance, which is a program to help the National RC&D Council become financially self-sufficient. The Tennessee Valley RC&D Council was also recognized as being certified in the national Circle of Diamonds of Excellence last year. Circle of Diamonds is a program designed to highlight Councils that have produced quality programs within their local community.

Mike Roden, Coordinator for the Tennessee Valley RC&D Council (selected as Alabama's Outstanding Coordinator), was chosen as the Outstanding Coordinator for the Southeastern region. Concerning the recognition, Mike offered these comments,

"I am thankful to the USDA-Natural

Resources Conservation Service for allowing me to work with the Tennessee Valley RC&D Council. It is indeed an honor, a privilege, and a blessing to be able to help dedicated volunteers and community minded officials to improve the environment and the communities in which we live. "

Mike is now being considered for nationwide recognition from 375 councils.



Mike Roden accepts award from Jeanette Jamieson, President of the Southeast Regional RC&D Association.

Storybook Farms in Lee County Gets RC&D Grant

by Anne Miller, Lee County District Administrative Coordinator

A Mid-South RC&D Council grant was awarded to Storybook Farms through the cooperation of the RC&D Committee, NRCS, and Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) in Lee County .

Storybook Farms provides weekly therapeutic horseback riding in a safe environment for children suffering from debilitating illnesses and for those enduring bereavement situations. Therapy is offered at no cost to the family. Storybook Farms' goal is to provide an outlet that will have a positive impact on each individual. The RC&D grant will be used for fencing materials for the 100 foot by 200 foot arena. The children use this area to learn handling and riding skills and the horses are regularly exercised there as well. Storybook Farms is an all volunteer organization and all donations benefit the program directly.

Storybook Farms is also working with Jason Gardner, Lee County NRCS District Conservationist, to provide cross fencing for rotational grazing and critical area planting with assistance from the



John Wild (r), president of the Auburn/Opelika Convention Visitors Bureau, and a member of the local Lee County RC&D Committee presents an RC&D grant to Deana Dougherty, founder and executive director of Storybook Farms. Also pictured is Jason Gardner (l), NRCS District Conservationist; and Wyspr Key, student volunteer.

Employees Help Hurricane Ivan Victims*

South Alabama SWCD/NRCS Employees Make a Difference

By: Janie Howell, DAC, Geneva, AL

There are times when you are just glad to be part of something. It's a proven fact that we are at our best during the worst of times.

Many of our NRCS/SWCD/FSA families were hit hard when Hurricane Ivan struck the Alabama/Florida coast on September 15-16, 2004. Detra Boutwell, District Conservationist in Escambia County, called and talked with her friends and former co-workers in southeast Alabama after the storm. David Elliott, Soil Conservation Technician in Brewton, was feeding about 100 people from his parents' home. Many were left homeless with no power expected for 2-3 weeks. So many items were needed...water, bread, canned goods, fresh fruit, paper products...by thousands of people.

Tanga Skinner, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician for Coffee County, brainstormed an idea to help Detra, David, and families in Escambia County and surrounding areas. E-mails were sent, phone calls and personal contacts were made. Coffee County NRCS, SWCD and FSA; Geneva County NRCS and SWCD; Houston County NRCS and SWCD; Pike County NRCS and SWCD; Covington County NRCS and SWCD; Barbour County NRCS, SWCD and FSA; and Wiregrass RC&D Office personnel got busy buying and collecting items that would help all who were hit by Ivan.

Tanga Skinner and I left Friday morning, September 24th, and took a truckload of supplies to Covington County, where James R. (Butch) Kelley, NRCS Construction Inspector, had another truckload waiting to load. Detra Boutwell and her step-father, Reverend Grady Palmer, picked up the items on a truck and trailer to deliver.

The names mentioned in this article are not for recognition or praise. The joy is in knowing people care and are willing to give when others are in need. Let's all take time to remember all those who have lost lives, homes, and personal belongings due to the hurricanes and floods in September 2004.



l-r: Janie Howell, Geneva County SWCD; Tanga Skinner, Coffee County NRCS; Merry Buford, Covington County NRCS; Reverend Grady Palmer; Detra Boutwell, Escambia County NRCS; James R. (Butch) Kelley, Covington County NRCS; load supplies to send to Hurricane Ivan victims in southwest Alabama.

Hurricane Ivan Relief in Autaugaville

USDA/NRCS employee Soil Conservation Technician Sandy Tucker of the Autaugaville Field office assisted the county FEMA to hand out 16 pallets of ice to citizens of Autaugaville.



*We know many people have helped out and are still helping the victims of these devastating storms. These are just the stories that were sent in. If we receive other success stories, we will continue this subject in the next newsletter.

RC&D Council Changes Name

Tennessee Valley RC&D Council and Area's name has been changed to the Alabama Mountains, Rivers and Valleys RC&D Council. The old name was often confused with TVA programs.

Updated all records and correspondence to reflect the name change.

PERSONNEL

Accessions

Larry Andrews, Soil Conservation Technician, Linden, AL
Pat Brewer, PPT, Secretary (Office Automation), Auburn, AL
Marshall Colburn, Soil Conservation Technician, Mobile, AL
Amber Johnson, Soil Conservationist, Hamilton, AL (10/31/04)
Scotty Noles, Soil Conservation Technician, Wedowee, AL
Alex Vaughan, Soil Conservationist, Dothan, AL

Promotions

Jody Burdette, Soil Conservationist, Centre, AL to District Conservationist, Oneonta, AL
Eddie Davis, Soil Scientist, Huntsville, AL
Jeffrey Ethridge, Soil Conservation Technician, Abbeville, AL
Jason Gardner, District Conservationist, Opelika, AL
Grant Gordy, Soil Conservation Technician, Marion, AL
Jean Sparks, Area Administrative Coordinator, Auburn, AL

Reassignments

Sid Brantly, Regional Grazing Land Specialist, Auburn, AL to Grazing Land Specialist, Lexington, KY
Chris Ford, Project Leader, Tuscaloosa MLRA Soil Survey Project Office, to Resource Soil Scientist, Decatur, AL (10/17/04)
Michael Gunn, Soil Conservation Technician, Linden, AL to Montgomery, AL
Angela Warden, Soil Scientist, Luverne, AL to Huntsville, AL (11/14/04)

Career Enhancement Program (Upward Mobility) Selectees

Michael Gunn, Soil Conservation Technician, Linden, AL, attending Auburn University
Chris Rice, Soil Conservation Technician, Scottsboro, AL, attending A&M University

October is Disability Awareness Month

by: Fay Garner, Alabama NRCS Disability Special Emphasis Program Manager

"Judge us by our ability, not our disability" is this year's NRCS theme.

The effort to educate the American public about issues related to disability and employment actually began in 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October each year "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to "National Disability Employment Awareness Month." For more information, check out the U.S Department of Labor website for answers to questions about disabilities and disability employment:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/faqs/main.htm>



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